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Advisory Announcement

For Immediate Release: December 18, 2020

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Cook Inlet Area

2020 Pacific Cod State-Waters Pot and Jig Seasons Close December 31

2021 Parallel Pacific Cod Seasons Open January 1

Emergency Order # 2-GF-H-02-21

The Cook Inlet Area (CI) state-waters Pacific cod seasons for pot and jig gear will close at midnight December 31. The parallel Pacific cod season will immediately open to pot, jig, and longline gear January 1, 2021. Fishermen are reminded that all fish must be landed within 24 hours following the closure of the 2020 state-waters season and prior to participating in the 2021 parallel season. Parallel Pacific cod seasons are established via emergency order (EO) to coincide with the season dates and gear types set by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the initial Pacific cod season in the adjacent federal Central Gulf of Alaska Regulatory Area (CGOA). The parallel Pacific cod season will close by EO for each gear type to coincide with respective gear sector closures in the federal CGOA.

Fishermen are reminded: 1) to obtain a Cook Inlet Area parallel Pacific cod season registration from Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) prior to fishing; 2) of the requirement for fishermen using pot or longline gear in parallel Pacific cod fisheries to have a functioning, activated, NMFS-approved vessel monitoring system (VMS) as described at <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/cwm> and, 3) to adhere to the federal seabird avoidance measures (SAM) which are required in all longline fisheries for groundfish in the North Gulf District of the Cook Inlet Area. Additional information describing SAM can be found at <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/seabird-avoidance-gear>.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ADF&G encourages the public to ask questions by phone. Registrations may also be completed by fax or e-mail. Contact the Homer office with groundfish regulatory and registration questions (907-235-8191). Registrations are also available in ADF&G offices in Homer, Cordova, Anchorage, Soldotna, and Kodiak if registration must be completed in person.

NMFS continues to prosecute the North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program. Vessel operators participating in parallel groundfish fisheries are encouraged to become familiar with this federal program. Information on the observer program can be found at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/observers/> or by contacting the NMFS Sustainable Fisheries Division in Juneau at (907) 586-7228.

Regulation 5 AAC 28.350 (b) closes certain waters on the west side of Cook Inlet and within Kachemak Bay to groundfish pot gear (Figure 1).

Two rookeries within the Cook Inlet Area, Outer (Pye) Island and Sugarloaf Island remain closed to fishing with pot or longline gear during a parallel Pacific cod season to protect Steller sea lions (Figure 2). Waters within three nautical miles (nmi) of these locations are closed to vessel transit and waters within 10 nmi of these locations are closed to fishing with fixed gear via emergency order. Contact NMFS in Kodiak at ph: (907) 481-1780 or consult the NMFS website at <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/sslpm>.

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Bycatch limits by species or species aggregate for the Cook Inlet Area are set by Emergency Order 2-GF-H-01-21 and may be found in the Central Region Groundfish Fisheries Outlook news release.

COVID-19

Under Alaska's Health Orders 5, 6, and 8, commercial fishing is an Essential Business and is part of Alaska's Essential Services and Critical Infrastructure. Commercial fishermen should ensure that all travel and other activities in support of commercial fishing operations follow protocols in Alaska COVID-19 Health Orders. COVID-19 Health Orders may be found here: <https://covid19.alaska.gov/health-order/>.

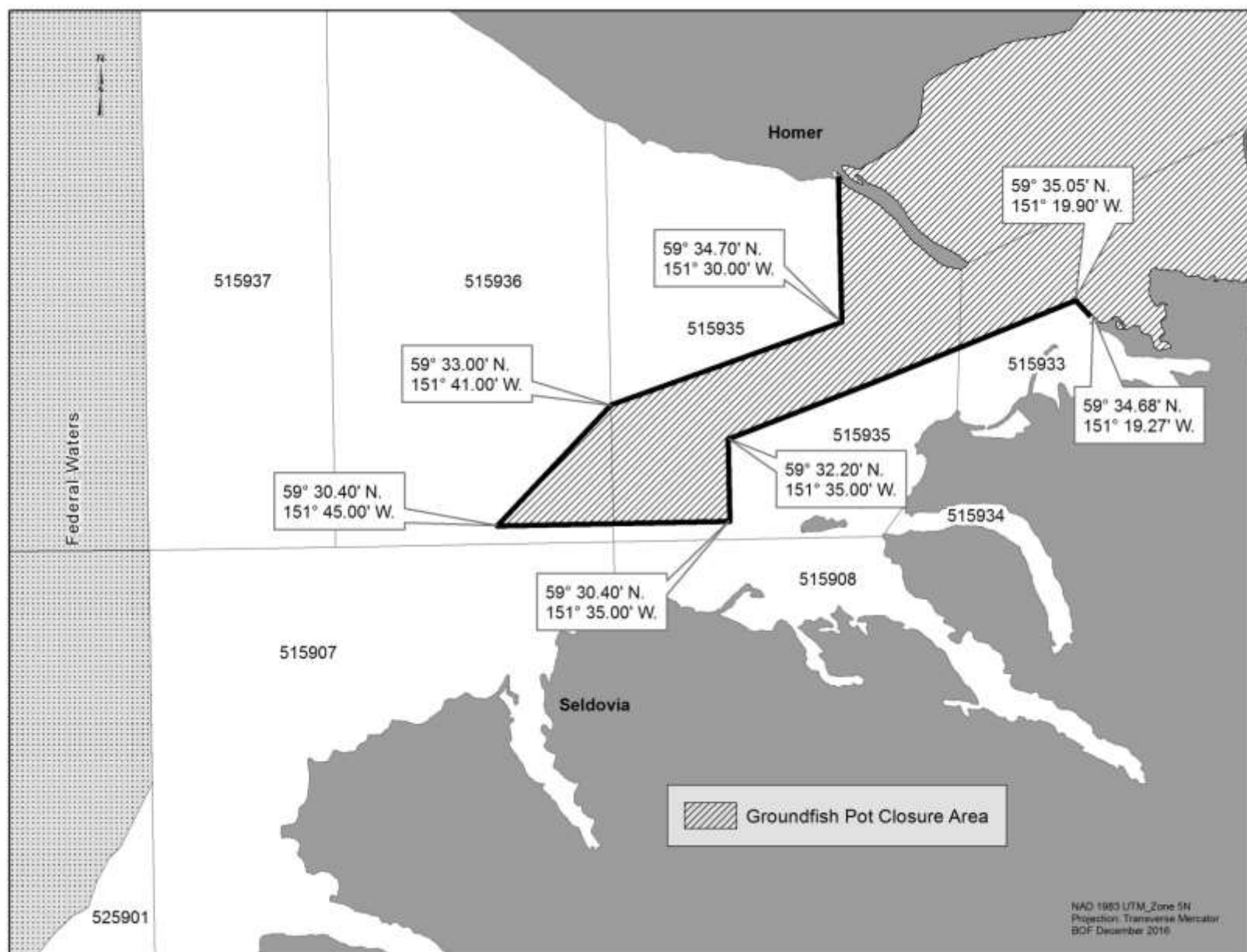


Figure 1. Kachemak Bay groundfish pot closure area with boundary coordinates and statistical areas.

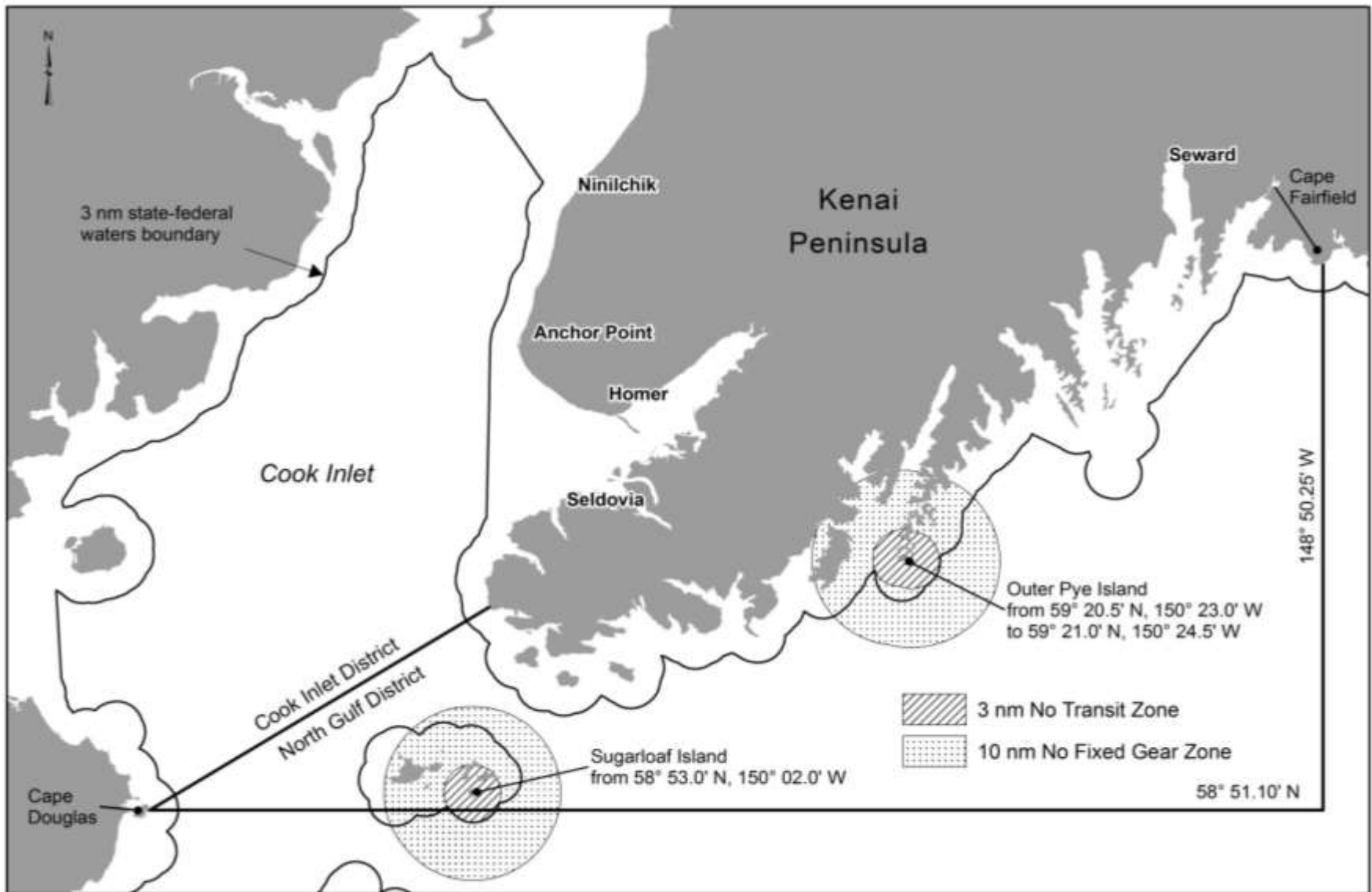


Figure 2.—Vessel no-transit and fixed gear Pacific cod fishing closure zones around Steller sea lion rookeries within the Cook Inlet Area.

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